United Nations E/ICEF/2001/P/L.25

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited
13 November 2000

Original: English

For information

United Nations Children's Fund
Executive Board
First regular session 2001
22-26 and 29 January 2001
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*

Country note**

El Salvador

Summary

The Executive Director presents the country note for El Salvador for a programme of cooperation for the period 2002 to 2006.

The situation of children and women

1. El Salvador has a population of 6.2 million, of whom 42.3 per cent are under the age of 18 and 29.5 per cent are adult women. In 1998, 51 per cent of the population lived in poverty. Per capita gross domestic product (GDP) is $1,032, yet distribution disparity is great, affecting living conditions of urban squatters in the capital, inhabitants of the rural areas of Usulután and San Vicente, and indigenous populations in Sonsonate. In 1998, the poorest quintile of homes shared only 3.7 per cent of national income, while the wealthiest quintile accumulated 55.4 per cent. Annual population growth is 1.9 per cent, and population density is among the highest in the world.

2. The 1979-1992 war delayed the process of development, but the Peace Accords initiated a new period of social, political and economic change. The most important gain has been advances in democratization. Unfortunately, economic reform, liberalization and adjustment geared to promote macroeconomic stability

* E/ICEF/2001/2.
** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its second regular session of 2001.

00-74742 (E) 271100

have not increased growth, which is 2.1 per cent. Foreign debt is increasing, and pre-war income levels remain out of reach. Remittances from abroad, which constitute 11.2 per cent of GDP, are a major source of income for many poor families still excluded from the development process. Poverty and emigration are major factors in vulnerability, particularly for families headed by women and those in rural and marginal urban areas.

3. Expenditure on basic social services increased from 11.2 per cent in 1990 to 14.4 per cent in 1999, but is still below the 20 per cent target and is compromised by the burden of foreign debt repayment, which consumes 40 per cent of export earnings. The budget allocations for basic social services — particularly in the health sector — cannot assure adequate coverage or good quality services. Local governments are starting to benefit from a 6 per cent transfer of the public budget, but decentralization needs to be accelerated and strengthened.

4. Many of the goals of the World Summit for Children have been met: under-five mortality dropped from 41 to 35 per 1,000 live births, immunization goals were achieved, and several micronutrient deficiencies were eliminated or lowered. Challenges remain, however: malnutrition is over 23 per cent, anaemia in children under five has increased to 30.5 per cent, maternal mortality is 120 per 100,000 live births, and early pregnancies represent one third of all births. Children continue to die of preventable infectious diseases, and the population continues to be plagued by cholera, dengue and other epidemics, in part due to illiteracy, low education levels, lack of safe drinking water and poor environmental conditions. The family unit is vulnerable, as well, because of such social problems as emigration of family members, unemployment and underemployment, and high levels of violence, including intra-family violence.

5. Education reform has raised enrolment levels in rural areas, but net enrolment is still low: 1.9 per cent for children under 4 years of age; 41.8 per cent for 4- to 6-years-olds; 81.7 per cent for primary school-age children; and 26.9 per cent for those in secondary school. Low education quality combined with poverty leads to high drop-out rates, grade repetition and high levels of child labour (children represent 16 per cent of the labour force).

6. Adolescents age 10 to 18 represent 20 per cent of the population. They are a high-risk group who still lack full opportunities and access to such services as education, vocational training, health — especially reproductive health — and safe spaces for recreation. Public policies are not geared to their needs and concerns. These realities contribute to poor educational levels; family and street violence and drug addiction; and high levels of teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS infection and gang membership. Young deportees from the United States, finding no services to help them reintegrate into society, often drift into gangs. Legislation protecting children in conflict with the law has recently been adopted, but there are serious difficulties in implementation.

7. El Salvador is prone to earthquakes, hurricanes and floods. The vulnerability of the population due to poverty, disparities and multiple exclusions is coupled with serious environmental risk due to inadequate land and water management and to unsustainable agricultural practices. This was made evident in 1998 when Hurricane Mitch struck the country, affecting some 85,000 people. Population density and poverty force the poor to settle on high, disaster-prone land, making them even more vulnerable.

8. New Government plans includes a strategic vision to address these concerns and guarantee child rights. A child and adolescent policy paper is currently being drafted, with UNICEF and non-governmental organization (NGO) participation. Other legislation compliant with the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been drafted and includes a Family Code, a law on minor offenders, and legislation supporting the disabled and controlling child labour and child prostitution.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

9. The primary strategy of the current country programme is service delivery at the local level, institutional capacity-building at national and local levels, and communication and social mobilization. During the 1999 mid-term review (MTR), programme objectives were reoriented towards the promotion and support of a comprehensive national system for the care of children, adolescents and women. The MTR recommended a programme approach that would help ensure sustainability and effectiveness through structural change at the legal, political and institutional levels. A child-rights focus on underlying causes of disparities and multiple exclusions, as well as strategic aspects such as participation and rights-demand mechanisms, was decided upon. Concrete results are expected at the local level, which then will provide feedback to policy formulation processes at the national level. Greater capacity to systematize achievements at the local level will be needed in order to influence policy-making.

10. Local and national information systems have not generated reliable, disaggregated information on the situation of children and women or on the impact of ongoing programmes. UNICEF has supported the Census Bureau in producing the first set of data on disparities by gender, age, socio-economic level and locality. This collaboration strengthened analytical and programmatic capabilities. Information on child labour, for example, produced in partnership with the Salvadoran Institute for Child Protection, enabled this issue to be widely debated. Information systems must continue to be strengthened to ensure that underlying causes of limitations to child development become clearer, thus providing a solid base on which to design better policies and strategies.

11. Local Defence Councils for Child and Adolescent Rights provided the structure for adolescent participation in social change and allowed their opinions to be heard. Youths have been able to take action to help flood victims, children in conflict with the law and teenage girls expelled from school due to pregnancies, while at the same time becoming involved in new activities and training, while gaining public recognition for their contributions. The country programme has been one of the many beneficiaries of youth participation; and the fact that UNICEF publicly values child and adolescent participation has improved their chances of being listened to at school and within their families and communities.

12. Hurricane Mitch, which caused hundreds of deaths, left thousand homeless and strained public services, revealed the need for emergency preparedness. Likewise, weak community organizations and local government structures are serious limitations to emergency prevention and effective response.

13. As revealed by studies undertaken by UNICEF, in collaboration with the Supreme Court and the Office of the Ombudsman, the media often incorrectly blame prevailing violence on juvenile delinquency, and some in Congress have reacted by

proposing harsh changes to the juvenile law that was adapted to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, a broadened partnership, including a strengthened media, have halted this unwanted legal reform.

Proposed country programme strategy

14. The proposed country programme was developed in the light of government, NGO and civil society priorities, the National Policy for Children, Adolescents and Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. There is agreement within the United Nations system to develop the Common Country Assessment and United Nations Development Assistance Framework within a human rights approach, though neither is yet completed.

15. The role of UNICEF, within the range of actors at work in El Salvador, is one of advocacy, information gathering and dissemination; social mobilization at local, regional and national levels in support of government priorities in poverty reduction; and realization of child and adolescent rights. UNICEF and its national, bilateral and multilateral partners will work to reduce the disparities that limit the holistic development of all children and adolescents, supporting capacity strengthening of family and community structures and local-level participation, to echo the commitments to poverty reduction and child fulfilment of rights at the national level.

16. The main programme strategy will be to enhance sustainability of child rights compliance both at national and local levels through support to the definition and application of national policies; national efforts in poverty reduction; and prioritization of socially and environmentally vulnerable groups in selected rural and marginal urban areas. Interventions will be made at national and local levels, using experience at the local level to support national efforts for structural change.

17. The general objective of the proposed programme is to promote sustainable compliance with child, adolescent and women's rights, assigning a strategic role to the family. Advocacy, institutional capacity-building and social mobilization strategies will lead to empowerment by all segments of society and sustainability of programme interventions. Impact will be demonstrated through disparity reduction and through participation of national and local government and civil society. Three interrelated programmes have been identified.

18. The *legislative and social policies and statistics programme* will seek to strengthen government and civil society capacity to develop participatory public policies, enabling rights compliance within a policy for integrated care of children, adolescents and women. The integrated approach to the definition of national policies will use gender and the life cycle approach to strengthen linkages between legislative, economic, judicial and social policies. A participatory process for the development of a New National Plan of Action for Children will be promoted. Priority will be given to the development of a Code for Children and Youth and Local Plans of Action for Children, including mechanisms to ensure sustainability.

19. The *rights compliance programme* will support institutional development for rights compliance, strengthening national and local systems for integrated childcare. Health interventions will be linked to basic education, water and environmental

sanitation, and hygiene education, including enhancement of local participation and management. Priorities in this area include support to health service reform and interventions in the reduction of maternal mortality and early pregnancies; child mortality and morbidity; HIV/AIDS prevention; malnutrition; and prevention and control of epidemics. Priority areas in education will include early childhood care and basic education, focusing on enhancing quality within the education reform process. Other priorities will include emergency preparedness and prevention of violence.

20. Local information systems will be strengthened to support national policy and programme development. A child rights and gender perspective will be promoted in the National Union of Municipalities and the Social Investment Fund. At the same time, experiences from local interventions will be used to inform national legislative, policy development and institutional strengthening processes.

21. The *rights demand and monitoring programme* will work to strengthen the role of children, adolescents and women in demanding rights compliance. Government counterparts, NGOs and community organizations will be trained in strategies for rights promotion, and special protection mechanisms will be supported nationally and locally. Mechanisms for direct representation of women and children in decision-making processes will be strengthened, especially locally, to reinforce participation and empowerment.

22. Cross-sectoral costs will supports multisectoral teams in the country office.

Estimated programme budget

Estimated programme cooperation, 2002-2006[a]

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	Regular resources	*Other resources*	*Total*
Legislative and social policies and statistics	800	2 000	2 800
Rights compliance	1 000	3 000	4 000
Rights demand and monitoring	619	2 000	2 619
Cross-sectoral costs	1 000		1 000
Total	**3 419**	**7 000**	**10 419**

[a] These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.